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AUTHOR Maring, Gerald H.; Furman, Gail
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ABSTRACT

The paper presents strategies to help regular class teachers help their mainstreamed students read and learn better. The seven teaching ideas are offered for use in "whole class" settings and are designed to benefit both mainstreamed and regular students. Further, the strategies can be used by subject matter instructors who cannot become extensively involved in remedial or individualized instruction. The following ideas are discussed and examples offered: (1) once a week oral reading, (2) pyramiding (helping students classify and subordinate related concepts or terms), (3) exploring texts with students, (4) contextual redefinition, (5) words on the wall (to reinforce key vocabulary), (6) guided reading procedures, and (7) special adaptations for study guides. (CL)

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by

Gerald H. Maring and Gail Furman

Seven "Whole Class" Strategies to Help Mainstreamed Youngsters Read and Learn Better in Content Area Classes

Wendy listens passively to her teacher's explanations without taking notes. When called upon, she demonstrates an understanding of the subject matter only if it has been discussed earlier. But she fails many of her tests because she never finishes her reading assignments in time and has difficulty reading through the test questions.

Jason is able to elaborate verbally on various topics. Since he has acquired many concepts and has learned a lot about the world, he appears bright and blessed with a large vocabulary. However, in class discussions, he seems to get off-track, wandering away from important and related concepts. He ends up saying, "Teacher, I don't know what you want." His written work shows the same inability to categorize and subordinate information in accurate and meaningful ways.

Eric is a hard worker. Despite his learning problems, he completes all assignments with the support of the resource room teacher. His participation in class discussions demonstrates his understanding of the vocabulary and concepts of the subject. But he performs poorly on written tests because he cannot identify in print the terminology he knows so well orally.

Many mainstreamed youngsters in middle and secondary schools have needs similar to those of these three youngsters. Saski and Carter (1984:178) note that mainstreamed youngsters "typically demonstrate weaknesses in comprehension and in application of reading abilities to content area tasks..." Specifically, mainstreamed students in regular classes commonly have problems in (1) learning subject matter terminology; (2) organizing information according to major concepts and subordinate details; and (3) completing and comprehending the textbook readings and assignments.

What teaching strategies can the regular classroom teacher use to help these youngsters read and learn better? The authors (one who regularly teaches courses in content area reading and study skills and the

other who is a special education teacher working on a doctoral degree in reading/special education) have teamed up to offer the following strategies that can assist mainstreamed youngsters master course content. These strategies are not strikingly new to many who are versed in the specialty area known as "content area reading." However, we hope that they will provide concrete and hands-on advice for the busy classroom teacher when a Wendy, Jason or Eric appears on the class roll.

We are recommending seven teaching ideas for use in "whole class" settings. We would like to emphasize that these seven activities will benefit both mainstreamed and "regular" students. Secondly, we would like to emphasize that the strategies can be used by subject matter instructors who do not have the time, training, desire, or responsibility to become extensively involved in remedial or individualized instruction. Helping individual students to any substantial degree is a rather unrealistic expectation when secondary school teachers may have five or more periods and over 150 students to teach.

1. Once a Week Oral Reading: This strategy (Manzo,1980) will help mainstreamed students overcome their fears of the text. It is particularly helpful for youngsters who, like Eric and Jason, need to improve recognition of subject matter terminology and who need assistance in identifying key concepts.

   First, select and begin to read aloud approximately two pages of the text. Instruct students to read along silently. Second, at an early and appropriate place, stop your oral reading and ask students to paraphrase the ideas. Third, respond to students' questions, clarifying, elaborating, and sharing your own viewpoints. Fourth, proceed in this fashion, stopping frequently and at appropriate places, until you and your students have walked your way through the reading assignment.

This once-a-week strategy should be used regularly so students become comfortable with its format. Textbook passages that contain important concepts or are especially difficult should be selected.

2. Pyramiding: This activity (described by Clewell, 1983, as well as others) is particularly helpful for mainstreamed youngsters who have difficulty classifying and subordinating related concepts or terms.

   First, each student reads through the reading assignment to identify facts and details. Second, after the students have written down the phrases or terms they feel are important, conduct a whole class discussion and use the chalk board to group ("pyramid") the facts and phrases into logical categories. Third, allow the entire class to decide upon a sentence that answers the question, "What is the author saying about these ideas?" This sentence becomes the base of the pyramid.

EXAMPLE

sweeteners

natural artificial

Corn sweetener sugar sacharrin sweet-n-low nutrasweet equal

Beverage makers add a variety of natural and artificial sweeteners to soft drinks.

In this activity, mainstreamed youngsters have the opportunity to learn from their peers by being exposed to their categorizing and reasoning processes. They can experience initial success if the teacher calls upon them first to suggest some of the important terms that belong above the ground level of the pyramid.

3. Exploring Texts with Students: Mainstreamed students may have experienced so much failure in reading in the past that they are often completely discouraged about reading their subject matter textbooks. Hence, helping these youngsters become comfortable with their texts is a way to motivate them to be more active readers. Other class members, who may have poorly developed study skills, will also benefit from exploring the structure of a new textbook. Early in the year, ask students discovery-type questions aimed at helping them learn to remember how the index, glossary, typographical formats, and other salient features of the textbook can help them learn better. However, it is not enough to do this once at the beginning of the year. Questions such as the ones that follow should be reviewed regularly as the class begins new chapters or units.

Examples of Text Exploration Questions

1. How many pages are in the glossary?
2. Where could you find more information about a term explained in the glossary? (Answer: index)
3. What are the first and last page numbers of the index?
4. Where would you find out about the author's point of view and reasons for writing the text? (Answer: usually in the preface; sometimes in the introduction)

5. Where can you most quickly acquire an overview of the major topics addressed in the book? (Answer: table of contents)
6. What different types of questions are placed at the end of the chapters? (Answer: factual questions, questions which involve thinking beyond what is literally stated, vocabulary exercises, and so on).
7. Of what value and purpose are the introduction and conclusion parts of the chapters? (Answer: they explain what the chapter will be about and what it was about, respectively).
8. What is the purpose of bold-face and italics? (Answer: they point out very important terms. Usually these terms are explained in the surrounding context.)
9. If you were going to try to read a chapter in three sittings, how would you divide up your study of the chapter? (Answer: not by dividing the number of pages by 3 equal number of pages. A chapter should be studied according to the logical divisions indicated by its subheads or sections).
10. When your teacher assigns questions at the end of the chapter for homework, should you read them before or after you begin to read the chapter? (Answer: Before--this will make your reading more efficient.)
11. Why is knowing the parts of a textbook and how to use them important? (Answer: You save time when you have to find answers.)
12. Why are some terms in the index indented? (Answer: they are the important components of a larger or broader concept.)

4. Contextual Redefinition: Many mainstreamed students have been so often overwhelmed by unknown words in their subject matter reading that they have "given up" on using the context clues that proficient readers rely on as a matter of course. The contextual redefinition strategy (Moore, Readence, and Rickelman, 1982) provides students with a framework for using context clues. It is most useful for social studies and literature assignments that do not have an extensive number of unfamiliar terms. It is effective because it does not inundate mainstreamed youngsters with a "threatening" number of unfamiliar words.

> First, analyze the chapter or reading assignment to identify those words which are essential to the content and which will be unfamiliar or difficult for your students. Second, using either your own words or those of the text (if the author has explained them adequately in context), write out sentences using these words and underline them. Third, put the words in list form on the chalk board and call upon individual students to explain what they think the word means. Call upon other students, asking them whether they agree or disagree. Fourth, ask the entire class to reach a consensus for the meaning of the term. Write that meaning on the chalkboard and proceed in this fashion, completing the remaining words. Fifth, using a transparency, project the word as it appears in the text or in the sentence you devised. Ask the students whether they stand by their original guess or whether they want to redefine their original position. Require them to give their reasons.

Given, for example, the sentence "Wapiti, or elk, abound in the mountainous regions of Montana," students could come to the chalkboard or overhead projector and point out how commas indicate the appositional structure and provide a cue to the meaning of words which have difficult pronunciations or are unknown. By watching and listening to their classmates deal with context clues in an overt manner, mildly handicapped youngsters will be encouraged to try context clue strategies for themselves.

5. Words on the Wall: Although subject matter instructors often give verbal explanations for key vocabulary, they sometimes neglect to present these words visually to the class. It is often a chore to pull out transparencies or to repeatedly place key words on the chalk board when they are referred to frequently during the unit of study. Words on the wall (Cunningham, 1981) is a strategy that focuses the attention of students on key words and enables the instructor to point to the important term as it surfaces again and again in class discussion and explanation. Thus, mainstreamed youngsters have many reinforcement opportunities that not only help them to remember the meaning of the word, but also enable them to recognize it in print and to notice its correct spelling.

First, preview the unit or chapter and select essential vocabulary terms. Using a magic marker, write these terms on half sheets of paper and file them alphabetically. A synonym or brief contextual explanation can be included. Second, when you introduce the term for the first time, take the half sheet of paper with the term on it over to the wall and tape it up with masking tape. Third, continue this process with the remaining terms as they occur during the unit. In time, the mainstreamed student and his classmates will have a constant reminder of all the key vocabulary of a particular chapter.

An additional benefit of words on the wall is that it provides a ready reference for correct spelling of vocabulary words when students need to include them in their writing assignments or tests.

6. Guided Reading Procedure: The two outstanding advantages of this strategy are that it allows mainstreamed youngsters to contribute to the teacher-led discussion (when they are called on first) and that it provides considerable verbal reinforcement of course content. As a result, mainstreamed students are not penalized because they are not able to learn the subject matter through reading. The Guided Reading Procedure was first reported by Manzo (1975).

First, choose a short selection in the text or duplicate a course-related article that will take ten minutes for the students to read. Tell the students they are to "read to remember everything." Second, tell the students to turn their books over on their desks if they finish before ten minutes. All books should be turned over at the ten minute mark. Third, ask individual students to tell you one by one everything they can remember. Number each response as you write it on the chalkboard. Call on the mainstreamed readers first to insure that they get to contribute before the more able readers contribute all the answers. Fourth, when responses lag, say "Listen as I read what I have written and see if you can remember anything else." Fifth, once their memories are exhausted, reread what is on the board. Then, give them one minute to reread portions of the passage to correct any inconsistencies or misinformation that is recorded on the board. If Jason says, "Number 27 is not right. It should be ...," the teacher should respond, "Can you read me the part of the text that lets you know that?" Let the class decide if Jason is right. Then correct number 27. Sixth, allow the students to add any additional information they had missed or forgotten, but had come up with after their one minute rereading and subsequent discussion. Seventh, ask the students to listen as you reread the information on the board and to try to decide which ideas seem to be the main ideas. When they ask your opinion of the main ideas, indicate to them the items you would select and explain how in your opinion the remaining items are subordinate to the ones you feel are main ideas. Eighth, ask them to take out a sheet of paper. Erase the board while they number 1-5. Have a student pick out of a hat five of the ten true-false items you have constructed prior to the lesson. Have them put T or F next to each number after you read each question. Students correct their own papers after the teacher rereads items and after the class decides whether each item was true or false. Ninth, repeat step eight one week later with the remaining true-false items.

Require mainstreamed students to participate in this procedure. They will learn some information during the ten minute reading and will be able to contribute to the list on the chalk board. Furthermore, by listening to the more able readers tell what they learn during their ten minutes of reading, they will learn much additional content and information.

Since the test is read aloud by the teacher and is in true-false format, mainstreamed students can get a good grade without

having to spell correctly or write. By conducting a Guided Reading Procedure every two weeks with a delayed retention test in the intervening week, all students in the class will begin to see the importance of remembering more of the content of their reading assignments.

7. Special Adaptations for Study Guides: Although study guides are time consuming to prepare, subject matter teachers have been using them for years. For mainstreamed youngsters, the structure they provide is particularly helpful when teachers build "crutches" into them.

One helpful aid for mainstreamed students is study guide questions that are keyed according to level of difficulty. Questions on study guides can usually be categorized into three levels of difficulty. Literal, inferential, and applicative levels are the commonly used categories. Devise an asterisk system that has no apparent rhyme or reason. For example, at times key the most difficult questions with a double asterisk, while at other times key them with three asterisks. Then, on an individual basis, tell your mainstreamed students that, for this particular study guide, you want them to answer all the questions that are keyed, for example, by double asterisks. You may be surprised at their performance on some of the questions you thought were too difficult. But, the rest of the class won't know on what basis you are differentiating assignments.

Another way to add "crutches" to study guides is to put the page, column, and paragraph number after certain questions (Wilkins and Miller, 1983). For example, a (92,2,2) would mean that the answer to

a particular question could be found on page 92, in the second column, and in the second paragraph.

A third adaptation is that study guides should follow the sequence of presentation in the text. Constructing study guides with an organizational pattern that differs from the text can be particularly confusing for mainstreamed youngsters. If pre-constructed study guides vary from the text's organization, have mainstreamed students complete the assignment in a small group setting with classmates who are willing to help and explain.

Concluding Remarks

These seven "whole class" strategies will not meet all the needs of mainstreamed youngsters. Middle and secondary school mainstreamed students certainly have other needs in the areas of study skills, writing development, socialization, vocational training, and survival math skills. Many practical ideas to help meet these needs can be found in journals like Teaching Exceptional Children, Academic Therapy, and the Journal of Learning Disabilities. In addition, course adaptations involving more individualization for specific students may be worked out through consultation with the special education staff, and may, in fact, be required by the student's Individualized Education Program (I.E.P.).

However, it is our hope that the strategies presented here will be a practical starting point for busy classroom teachers in meeting the needs of mainstreamed students. Hopefully, more such teaching ideas will be forthcoming in the professional literature.

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